**Paul’s Sermon in Athens (Apologetics)**

Good morning! My name is Stephen – I’m one of the elders here. Anyone here like Jeopardy?

If you know the answer just shout it out, but please remember to phrase your answer in the form of a question! Let’s see if you can figure out what I’m going to talk about today!

The category is: Things in the Bible that start with “A”

Here’s your first clue:

“The fifth book of the New Testament”

* Acts

Here’s your next clue:

This city in southern Greece, home of philosophers, and was visited by Paul on his 2nd journey.

* Athens

Here’s your last clue:

“The branch of theology concerned with the defense or proof of Christianity.”

* Apologetics

Guess what we’re talking about today?!

A few months ago, Robin called and asked me if I would preach on Apologetics. I said, “IIIIII’mmmm sssooorrrrrrrryyyy.” There done. A whole lesson on apologetics in two words. No, I didn’t really say that. Because everyone knows that apologetics is not at all about apologizing. Apologetics is “the branch of theology concerned with the defense or proof of Christianity.”

So, then I said, “what exactly about apologetics do you want me to preach on?” And he said, “well, we’ll be in a series where we’re preaching through the sermons in Acts, and I’d like you to cover Acts 17.” And I said, “Great! That I can do! Acts 17.”

So, open your Bibles to 1 Peter 3. We’ll get to Acts 17 in a minute.

When it comes to apologetics, that is, defending *why* we believe *what* we believe, 1 Peter 3:15 is a key verse.

“…but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.”

In other words, “Always be prepared to explain why you’ve chosen to put your hope in Christ.”

Now, notice in that verse that it doesn’t actually say what your **defense** should be, nor even what your **hope** is.

It just says be ready. And be nice.

Now it’s important to know that this verse falls right in the middle of a section on suffering as a Christian for the sake of righteousness.

So, it basically says that as you’re getting pounded on for what you believe

* be sure to hold on to *what* you believe
* and keep your wits about you so you can explain *why* you believe
* and do so with an attitude that aligns with *who* you believe

That’s kind of a lot to ask, and when I was younger, I remember thinking, “It doesn’t even say what our hope **is**, or what we’re supposed to **say** to defend it!”

It’s like he just assumes they know what “hope” he’s talking about.

Well, now I think they actually **did** know what he was talking about.

The “hope” he was talking about was such an integral, fundamental part of who they were as Christians that they didn’t need to explain it.

But it turns out that if you keep reading, he eventually does say **what** it is that we hope for, and **why** we can have that hope.

And you’re probably wondering, “How many times is he going to say the word ‘hope’ and not tell us what it is?”

I promise we’ll come back here later :)

But by then you will already know what it is :)

But right now, let’s go to Acts 17 to get a lesson from Paul.

Because he does answer two questions for us:

1. What is the reason for our hope?
2. How do we explain and defend it to others?

Leading up to what we’re about to read

* Paul had just come down from northern Greece to Athens
* He was waiting on Timothy and Silas to join him
* As he toured the town of Athens, he noticed it was “full of idols”
* Seeing all those idols provoked his spirit
* So, he first went to the synagogue to reason with the Jews there
	+ In v2-3 it says that was his custom, to go to the synagogue
	+ And, as was his custom, he showed them from the “Scriptures” about how the Christ must suffer and rise from the dead
	+ Then he says, “This **Jesus**, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ”
* And besides the synagogue, Paul also went into the marketplace every day
	+ Now Athens is where the philosophers lived
		- It had been the home of Plato, Socrates, Aristotle
		- And in Paul’s time was the home of the Epicureans and Stoics
	+ And Paul, being highly educated, probably found himself right at home with these guys
	+ So, he reasoned with the local philosophers in the marketplace
	+ And he clearly got their attention because it says they wanted to “know what these things mean” – so much so that “they *took* him and *brought* him to the Aereopagus” where all the big time philosophers went
	+ And that’s where we find Paul in v22.

Now when we read v22-34 it only takes 3-4 minutes. I’m pretty sure Paul had a lot more to say, so this is probably just a summary of his conversation with them. Let’s read.

 Acts 17:22-34

So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for

 “In him we live and move and have our being”;

as even some of your own poets have said,

 “For we are indeed his offspring.”

Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, “We will hear you again about this.” So Paul went out from their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

So, Paul starts by telling them that the one thing they say is “unknown” to them, is what he’s going to tell them all about.

And then he declares to them the nature and power of God, and our relationship to God.

Let’s look again at what Paul says about God.

v24

He goes all the way back to Genesis 1.

There is one God who made everything, and he is now Lord of everything.

The God who made everything can’t be contained in a building.

v25

He doesn’t depend on us. He doesn’t rely on us to offer sacrifices so he can have what he needs. Rather, we depend on Him.

He created all life and he continues to sustain it.

v26

He made every person who ever lived.

He’s in charge of history (time of events/periods) and he’s in charge of geography (borders of nations).

v27

Man is made in such a way that we are compelled to seek God.

* Anthropologists always discover all over the world that civilizations both old and new worship something. It’s built into us – probably by God!
* The reason we fail to find him is because of what Paul says in Romans 1. We “exchange the truth about God for a lie and worship … the creature rather than the Creator.” Our idols today are generally different than their idols back then, but the pattern is the same. And this is exactly what the people of Athens had done.

And yet, Paul says here, God is not far from us.

The truth is, we are the ones who are far from him. If it weren’t for our sin, we would never become separated from him, because…

v28

We are His offspring; we are composed of the same stuff He is. Not the physical stuff; but life and thought and motion.

v29

So, clearly, God is not an idol made by man.

v30

He has been gracious to overlook our ignorance.

But now he has revealed his will to us, and he expects us to hear him and obey.

We have no excuse anymore to not know God and follow His ways.

v31

Paul says that **this** God defines what’s right and what’s wrong, and there’s a day coming when he’s going to judge each one of us based on **his** standard. And he has appointed a very special man to be this judge.

Now at this point you can almost imagine all the philosophers kind of clapping and saying, “Great theory, well done! If only there was a way we could know what you say is true.”

And then, as they say, Paul drops the mic. He says,

“and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

Boom!

Can’t you just see them all sitting there, “Uh, what? What did you just say?”

“God raised him from the dead.”

Our assurance, our confidence, that God is who he says he is, and can and will do what he says he will, comes from the fact that God demonstrated his power and his truth by raising Jesus from the dead.

This is the thing that Paul ultimately relies on to support all his other claims about God.

There is the answer to Question #1: What is the reason for our hope? Jesus rose from the dead!

The fundamental truth that supports all our hope is the fact that Jesus is alive. We serve a risen Savior.

And God himself makes promises to us based on that fact. For example:

* Romans 8 – He who raised Jesus from the dead will raise you from the dead too.
* 1 Peter 1 – Because Jesus rose from the dead, we have living hope to live with God forever.
* Philippians 3 – We can know the power of his resurrection and attain the resurrection from the dead.
* Philippians 3 – He will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body.
* 1 Corinthians 15 – God gives us victory over sin and death through Jesus, who rose from the dead.

A few years after Paul preached here in Athens, he wrote a letter to the church in Corinth just 50 miles down the road. 1 Corinthians ch15 is all about the resurrection. If you scan through 1 Corinthians 15 vs12-34 you find Paul answering the question, “What if Jesus didn’t really rise from the dead?” In a nutshell, here’s what he says.

If Jesus did not rise from the dead

* All of Paul’s preaching was for nothing
* In fact, Paul was misrepresenting God
* Plus, your faith is futile
* Because you are still in your sins
* Furthermore, dead people no longer even exist
* Those of us who are Christians should just be pitied for putting all our hope in something that’s not true
* So, let’s party because nothing really matters

No kidding. The Bible really says that. If Jesus didn’t rise from the dead, you might as well just get everything you can out of life because when it’s over, it’s over. But it’s **not** over! Jesus did rise from the dead! And starting in v35 of 1 Corinthians 15 Paul begins to tell us what followers of Jesus can expect as a result of that. Here’s what he says:

1 Corinthians 15:35–57

[35] But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain.

[42] So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

[46] But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as **is** the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we **shall** also bear the image of the man of heaven.

[50] I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

[56] The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives **us** the victory *(over sin and death)* through our Lord Jesus Christ. *(Who already did what? Rose from the dead.)*

Now that’s as far as he goes in 1 Corinthians. If you want to know what happens next, right after this, read 1 Thessalonians 4. But not now! Because now we’re going to go back to Acts 17 where we left Paul talking to the philosophers in Athens. Paul had just dropped the mic by saying that Jesus rose from the dead. What was their response to that?

v32

Some mocked him, some wanted to know more.

v33

Paul’s reaction was, he “went out from their midst”. That reminds us of 1 Pet 3:15, where we’re supposed to explain our hope “with gentleness and respect”.

v34

He continued to teach those who would listen; and some believed.

Notice how Paul approached his listeners. He started where they were and reasoned with them. He showed them how some of their beliefs were inconsistent, and how God’s revelation about himself answered their questions. Because they were what kind of people? They were philosophers. He interacted with them the way they needed to be interacted with. And when he was done explaining, some of them rejected it and some wanted to know more. And so, Paul said, “Thank you for your time. If anyone wants to know more, I’ll be down the street at the Starbucks-opagus. You’re welcome to join me there.”

In his book “Irresistible”, Andy Stanley says this,

“Every generation of believers must be prepared to explain their decision to follow Jesus *in* their generation *to* their generation out of concern *for* their generation.”

There’s a “generational context” that we all live within. Paul’s context in Athens was among philosophers who “would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.” (That’s in v21) So, he addressed them in a way that fit who they were and how they were prepared to listen.

There was a time when we could defend our beliefs simply by saying “the Bible says so.” Not any more. Therefore, we need to address our generation in a way that fits who they are and how they’re prepared to listen.

There’s the answer to Question #2: How do we explain and defend it to others? Talk about Jesus in the way that people are prepared to listen.

More specifically, it seems that today’s generations tend to appreciate our personal stories of how the grace and love of Jesus have changed us, and how his Word has taught us a new way to live, to think, and to hope.

So, what’s your story? Let me ask you some questions that may help you clarify to yourself what your story is. There’s tons of these, but I’ll just show you a few. Then, if you can ask, and answer, some of these questions in the course of a conversation, you’ll be telling your story. Here we go…

* What were you like before you heard about Jesus?
* What did you think life was all about back then?
* What caused you to start thinking about spiritual stuff?
* What was it about Christianity that got your attention?
* What doubts and concerns did you still have even when you decided to follow Jesus?
* How are you better off now as a disciple of Jesus?
* What do you think life is all about now?
* Finally, a series of these: Jesus has helped (is helping) me change
	+ From angry, understanding
	+ From aloof, affectionate
	+ From sad/fearful, joyful
	+ From anxious, peaceful
	+ From rude, patient
	+ From apathetic, kind
	+ From harsh, gentle
	+ From selfish, caring
	+ From out of control, self-controlled
	+ From dreading/ignoring/uncertain my future, having hope for my future

But whenever you tell your story, there always comes a point when you need to **know** why, and be able to **explain** why, you have hope.

Which means, there always comes a point when you need to **know** why, and be able to **explain** why, you believe Jesus rose from the dead.

So, I’m going to show you a *few* *popular* resources that can help you learn, both from inside the Bible and from outside the Bible, evidence for why we can be certain that Jesus rose from the dead. I’m just going to buzz through these quickly, but if you ask me later I can give you a list.

APOLOGETICS RESOURCES

Apologetics Press

* www.apologeticspress.org
* There are eight main articles on the resurrection of Jesus. But when you search for “resurrection” it yields over 1200 articles.
* There is all kinds of other really great stuff there.

The classics:

*Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (Josh McDowell and Sean McDowell - theologians)

* Ch 10: The Resurrection: Hoax or History?

*Case for Christ* (Lee Strobel - journalist)

* Part 3: Researching the Resurrection

These next two are a little more recent.

*The Reason for God* (Tim Keller)

* Ch 13: The Reality of the Resurrection

And in the category “For Scholars Only”

*The Resurrection of the Son of God* (N.T. Wright)

* 800 pages of everything you ever wanted to know about the resurrection of Jesus

Next, a couple of other newer ones:

*Doubtless: Because Faith is Hard* (Shelby Abbot)

* Addresses the various doubts we often have in our high school and college years
* Ch 7: It All Hinges on This
	+ Has summaries of some of the most compelling reasoning supporting the resurrection of Jesus, including some from those previous books by Keller and Wright

*Jesus is Alive: Evidence for the Resurrection for Kids* (Sean McDowell)

* Obviously geared toward younger folks – it’s great stuff

If you’re more of the “I like my apologetics in bite-size video nuggets” type, this one is pretty good:

*The 10 Worst Objections to Christianity* (Sean McDowell - theologian)

* Available on RightNow Media. Three-minute clips on topics like
	+ The apostles stole the body of Jesus
	+ Jesus never existed
	+ Aliens stole the body of Jesus (no kidding)

And finally:

Cold-Case Christianity (J. Warner Wallace - homicide detective)

* coldcasechristianity.com
* Search for “Resurrection”

A lot of the reasoning supporting the resurrection of Jesus can be summarized like this:

1. The tomb where Jesus was buried is empty. The massive stone was tossed aside. There was no body inside. No one ever found a body that was confirmed by people who **knew** him to **be** him. And believe me, if the Jewish leaders could have produced one, they would have.
2. Jesus appeared, **alive**, to many people who knew him (some who had opposed him) after he had died.
3. Those people believed so strongly that they determined to proclaim that Jesus rose from the dead, and as a result suffer and die themselves. They saw him. They had dinner with him. They had breakfast with him. They talked with him and touched him. They watched him ascend into heaven. And then they went out and told everyone about him.

I promised you we would go back to 1 Peter 3. So, now I will show you the rest of the story about our hope.

 1 Peter 3:15-22

…but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a **good conscience**, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might **bring us to God**, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.

Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an **appeal to God for a good conscience**, **through the resurrection of Jesus Christ**, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

Baptism, which corresponds to Noah being saved through the flood, now saves you.

Not by washing the dirt off your body. But by appealing to God for a good conscience.

Anyone here have a good conscience before God? I do :) And you can too!

How can we have a good conscience knowing that we’ve done sinful things?

See, an appeal for a good conscience is also, at the same time, an appeal to remove our guilt. To have our sins washed off our soul.

Peter says we can appeal to God for that based on the fact that Jesus has been resurrected.

There it is. That’s our hope **and** the reason for it.

Our hope is to be free from the penalty of our sins **and** to enjoy being with God who loves us so much he gave his only Son to die for us.

And what’s the reason for our hope? Jesus rose from the dead.

[Left] What’s the reason for your hope? Jesus rose from the dead.

[Middle] What’s the reason for your hope? Jesus rose from the dead.

[Right] What’s the reason for your hope? Jesus rose from the dead.

Final Jeopardy: “The reason for my hope.”

“What is”, and all the church said, “Jesus rose from the dead.”

Hhmmhh :) Boom.

If this message today has piqued your interest and you want to know more, we would love to explain more about what we believe and why we believe it.

If you’d like to have all your sins washed off your soul, and have true hope of being resurrected to live with God in joy and peace forever, the water’s ready.

Let’s sing.